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The “King-Makers” Pull the Rug from Syria, Yet Again... A “Greek Tragedy” Begins – Alastair Crooke

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By Alastair Crooke
Strategic Culture

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Syria has been disintegrated and pillaged in the name of ‘liberating’ Syrians from the threat of ISIS, which they – Washington – had installed in the first place.

James Jeffrey, former U.S. Ambassador to Iraq and Turkey, in a March 2021 **interview** with PBS *Frontline*, laid out very plainly the template for what has just happened in Syria this month:

“Syria, given its size, its strategic location, its historical importance, is the pivot point for whether [there can be] an American-managed security system in the region ... And so you’ve got this general alliance that is locked in with us. But ... the stress point is greatest in Syria”.

Jeffrey explained (in the 2021 interview) why the U.S. shifted its support to Jolani and *Hayat Tahrir al-Sham* (HTS):

“We got Mike Pompeo to issue a waiver to allow us to give aid to HTS – I received and sent messages to HTS” -The messages coming back from HTS were: “We [HTS] want to be your friend. We’re not terrorists. We’re just fighting Assad”.

The PBS *Frontline* interviewer asks: The U.S. was “supporting indirectly the armed opposition”? To which Jeffrey responds:

“It was important to us that HTS not disintegrate ... our policy was ... was to leave HTS alone ... And the fact that we haven’t targeted [HTS] ever, the fact that we have never raised our voice to the Turks about their cohabitation with them — in fact, I used this example the last time I was talking to very senior Turks – when they started bitching about this relationship we [the U.S.] have with the SDF [in eastern Syria]”.

“I said to them, “Look, Turkey has always maintained that you want us in northeast Syria, which they do. But you don’t understand. We can’t be in northeast Syria without the platform, because we only have hundreds of troops there”; ... I said: “It’s just like you in Idlib ...”.

“We want you to be in Idlib, but you can’t be in Idlib without having a platform, and that platform is largely HTS. Now, unlike the SDF, HTS is a UN-designated official terrorist organisation. Have I ever, or has any American official ever, complained to you about what you’re doing there with HTS? No ...”.

David Miller, a British academic, has **noted** that in 2015, prominent Syrian Sunni Muslim scholar, Shaykh al-Yaqoubi (who is anti-Assad), was unconvinced by Jolani’s efforts to rebrand Al Qa’ida as Jabhat al-Nusra. Jolani, in his al-2013 *Al-Jazeera* interview twice confirmed his allegiance to al-Qa’ida, saying that he received orders from its leader, Dr Ayman [al-Zawahiri] ... and those were to not target the West. He confirmed his own position as being that of hardline intolerance toward those who practiced a ‘heretical’ Islam.

Miller **comments**:

“While ISIS put on suits; allowed Syria to be carved up by the U.S.; preach peace with the Zionist state; want free markets; and cut gas deals with their regional patrons – their ‘true-believers’ ... in the Sunni identitarian diaspora haven’t yet clocked that they’ve been sold out – as was always the plan”.

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Of course, James Jeffrey's account was nothing new. Between 1979 and 1992, the CIA **spent** billions of dollars funding, arming, and training Afghan Mujahideen militia (like Osama bin Laden) in an attempt to bleed the USSR dry by pulling it into a quagmire. It was from the ranks of the Mujahideen that al-Qa'eda emerged.

*"And yet, by the 2010s, even as the U.S. was ostensibly at war with al-Qaeda in Iraq and Afghanistan – it was secretly working with it – in Syria on a plan to overthrow Assad. The CIA spent around \$1 billion per year training and arming a wide network of rebel groups to this end. As Jake Sullivan, **told** Secretary of State Hillary Clinton in a leaked 2012 email, "AQ [al-Qaeda] is on our side in Syria", as Alan Macleod observes in Consortium News.*

Turkish press accounts largely confirm this Jeffrey scenario was the current gameplan: Ömer Önhon, former senior Ambassador and Deputy Under-Secretary in charge of Middle East and Asia at the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, **writes** that:

"the operation to overthrow Assad's regime in Syria was meticulously planned for over a year, with coordinated involvement from Turkey, the United States, and several other nations. Through various statements it has become clear that Assad's departure resulted from an intricate web of agreements between virtually all stakeholders. Whilst HTS is actively working to rebrand itself – this transformation remains to be proven."

This HTS story has a precedent: In the summer following Israel's 2006 (unsuccessful) war on Hizbullah, Dick Cheney sat in his office loudly bemoaning Hizbullah's continuing strength; and worse still, that it seemed to him that Iran had been the primary beneficiary from the U.S. 2003 Iraq war.

Cheney's guest – the then Saudi Intelligence Chief, Prince Bandar – vigorously concurred (as **chronicled** by John Hannah, who participated in the meeting) and, to general surprise, Prince Bandar proclaimed that Iran yet could be cut to size: Syria was the 'weak' link that could be collapsed via an Islamist insurgency. Cheney's initial scepticism turned to elation as Bandar said that U.S. involvement might be unnecessary. He – Bandar – would orchestrate and manage the project: *'Leave it to me'*, he said. Bandar separately told John Hannah: *"The King knows that other than the collapse of the Islamic Republic itself, nothing would weaken Iran more than losing Syria"*.

Well ... that first effort did not succeed. It led to bloody civil war, but ultimately President Assad's government survived.

So, Jeffrey was simply reiterating in 202 its sequel: the original Wahabbi-led 'rug pull' on Syria by the Gulf was simply to be reverse engineered into a HTS hit by a rebranded amalgam of various militia made up primarily of former fighters (many not Syrian) from al-Qaeda/al-Nusra and ISIS, directed – in this second iteration – by Turkish Intelligence and **financed by Qatar**.

Syria thus has been disintegrated and pillaged in the name of 'liberating' Syrians from the threat of ISIS, which they – Washington – had installed in the first place, and which the U.S. then used to justify the north-east of Syria's occupation by U.S. forces. In the same mode, the unspoken part of this plan is to make *secular* Syria – with its legal system taken from France – 'Islamic' (*"we will implement Islamic law"*) to justify the Israeli attacks and land grabs, which are being presented as 'defensive measures against jihadists'.

Of course, it is correct that there is likely money to be made from these events. It was never proven, but seismic surveys before the first Syria war began in 2011, seemed to show that there may well be substrata deposits of oil or gas in Syria, beyond the relatively small fields in the north-east. And yes, re-construction will be a bonanza for Turkey's languishing construction sector.

Syria's ailing military was no direct military threat to Israel *per se*. So you may wonder, why are they **tearing the place apart**? *"Israel's goal here is to basically wreck Syria"*, Professor Mearsheimer opines. *"It's not in large part because of Israel, by the way. I think the Americans and the Turks played a much more important role than Israel did – in wrecking Syria". "The country is wrecked and I don't know anybody who thinks that the rebels who are now in control in Damascus are going to be able to restore order in that country ... From Israel's point of view, this is a perfectly fine situation"*, Mearsheimer adds.

U.S. anti-Russia hawks also hoped that Russia might take the bait of a wrecked Syria to get enmired into a widening Middle East quagmire.

All of which takes us directly back to Jeffrey's statement: *"Syria, given its size, its strategic location, its historical importance, is the pivot point for whether [there can be] an American-managed security system in the region ..."*.

Syria has been from the outset – from 1949 – 'the balancer' to Israel in the region. That is now over, leaving only Iran to balance the Israeli thrust to a 'Greater Israel'. It is no surprise then that the Israelis are agitating for the Americans to join with them in another orgy of destruction – this time **to be visited on Iran**.

Did Russia have foreknowledge of what was afoot in Idlib, and the orchestration of a transition of power? Of course! The very effective Russian services must have known, as this Syria project has been ongoing since the mid 1970s (**through** the *Hudson Institute* and Senator Scoop Jackson).

Assad had been signalling over the last four years, his desperate plan with Saudi, UAE and Egypt **to a move towards** a more pro-Israeli/pro-Western stance, in the hope of normalising with Washington and thereby gaining some sanctions relief.

Assad's play failed – and Syria likely will emerge as 'Greek tragedy' whereby tragedy evolves as actors play out their own natures. Quiescent ethnic and sectarian tensions likely will re-ignite; wildfires will catch. The lid is off. And Russia was never going to take the bait of plunging in.

The U.S.-Israeli alliance has long wanted Syria. And now, they have got it. Any concomitant mayhem is down to them. Yes, the U.S. – in theory – may applaud itself for achieving more of *"an American managed security [and*

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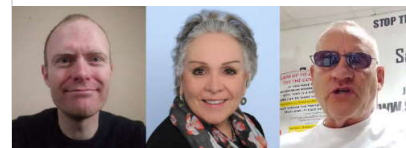
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energy dominant flow] system".

But the U.S. ruling strata, however, were never going to let Europe be energy independent. The U.S. needs West Asia's energy assets *for itself* – to collateralise its debt-overload. European states are left to tumble, as the fiscal crunch bites and European growth tails away.

Others may see a collateral scenario – that a conflicted and possibly re-radicalised Middle East will inflict further strain onto the already 'livid' domestic social tensions in Europe.

Israel nonetheless is **relishing** its 'win'. Winning what? Former IDF Chief of Staff and Defence Minister 'Bogie' Ya'alon puts it this way:

"The current Israeli government's path is to conquer, annex, commit ethnic cleansing ... and to establish Jewish settlements. Polls show some 70% of Israelis, sometimes more, support this – AND for Israel to be a liberal democracy".

"This [contradictory] path will lead us to destruction", he concludes.

What other can be the final end to this Zionist project? There are more than seven million Palestinians between the 'River and the Sea'. Are they all to vanish from the map?

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